

## ***Presence Pursued: A Longing for God***

Psalm 25<sup>i</sup>

Read your Bible with any degree of care, and sooner-or-later you get the picture. In here the Holy Spirit often repeats a fundamental fact. The fact that God came looking for us way before we ever started looking for Him. John nails it, “We love Him *because* He **first** loved us.”

But, once you understand God’s grace-driven initiating love, the only fitting response is to love Him back. “We **LOVE** Him because He first loved us.”

We can do that **because** God has created us with an incredible capacity to “give ourselves.” We can hand ourselves over. We can focus. We can hone in. We can choose to be dedicated to something that can consume our attention and energies. Just think of all the things that human beings “give themselves” to

- Research, discovery and academic excellence
- Music, drama, entertainment and the arts
- Sports of every kind: soccer, football, golf, basketball, track, tennis, hockey, iron-man contests, boxing, weightlifting (endless list)
- Food and the culinary arts
- Business and the making of thousands and thousands of dollars

You can “give yourself” to your family, to the playing of video games, to religion or to atheism, to politics or to community service. One website called “the fastlaneforum”<sup>ii</sup> put it like this:

**Join 40,000+ entrepreneurs  
who are kicking butt and  
winning their dream life.**

The strongest power in the world (it continued) is The Power of Dedication...the most underestimated, but the most rewarding principle that doesn't care about who you are, how much money you have, what you can or cannot do or anything else.

[Dedication] allows you to change your life no matter what. It allows you to get results...It allows you to live your life being happy and succeed in any sphere of life.

The power of dedication. So...what does it look like when a Christian – a disciple of Jesus Christ – is truly dedicated? I think it looks like Psalm 25. Listen to David sing:

**Psalm 25**<sup>iii</sup> To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

<sup>2</sup>O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.<sup>3</sup>Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

<sup>4</sup>Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.<sup>5</sup>Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

For the next 25 minutes, let's read and study this incredible portion of Scripture. Why? Because it can – if we will let it -- tattoo on our hearts this truth:

**The friendship of God is fully enjoyed by the one  
who gives himself – in every way – to the Lord**

This incredible song eagerly sings into our hearts what it means to GIVE OURSELVES – in every way – to the Lord...and the incredible friendship which happens with God when we do. Are you ready for a friendship with God? Then lean in.

THE BASIC CHOICE

Will you notice, first of all, **THE BASIC CHOICE** David makes? – vs. 1: **to you, O LORD, do I lift up my soul** -- לָדוֹד : אֵלֶיךָ, יְהוָה נִפְשִׁי אֲשָׂא. An incredibly beautiful Hebrew phrase, easily visualized. As if David wraps his hands around his entire life—around everything that goes on in his life because the Lord has gives him “breath”— he takes his *nephesh* (“soul”).

*NEPHESH*.<sup>iv</sup> *soul, self, life, creature, person, appetite, mind, living being, desire, emotion, passion*<sup>v</sup>

- a. *that which breathes, the breathing substance or being, soul, the inner being of man*
- b. *living being*
- c. *living being (with life in the blood)*
- d. *the man himself, self, person or individual*
- e. *seat of the appetites*
- f. *seat of emotions and passions*
- g. *activity of mind*
- h. *activity of the will*
- i. *activity of the character*

...and sets it before up the Lord.<sup>vi</sup> His first words are emphatic: **To YOU, O Lord...I lift up my life.**

It's what a young man or woman does when they enlist in the Marines. It's what a Secret Service agent does when he/she commits to protecting our President. It's what a bride and a groom do at the sacred altar of marriage. It's what Jesus did when he committed to the Father's plan of the cross.

It's what you and I do when we come to Romans 12 and hear the Spirit say, “Because of the mercies of God present yourselves to God as a living sacrifice.” You lift up your *nephesh*.

And yet, giving-yourself to the Lord is more than just a beautiful, devotional moment. There are **habits** which happen in the life of someone who gives herself, who gives himself, to God. **Habits** woven and mixed together in the 22 verses of this song. This Psalm is much like a missing sock-basket; it's not neatly organized like you might expect. One commentator remarked, "This Psalm hardly admits of formal division."<sup>ii</sup> Translation – "What a disorganized prayer!" A lot like my praying; perhaps yours as well.

Yet the key HABITS<sup>vii</sup> are beautifully woven together, and David's prayer kinda jumps back and forth between them.

## **LIFTING-UP HABITS**

### ***Habit #1***

#### **Patiently *trusting God* in trouble**

<sup>25:2</sup> O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;  
they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

<sup>16</sup> Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

<sup>17</sup> The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses.

<sup>18</sup> Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.

<sup>19</sup> Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.

There is no doubt David had enemies, and he faced them often:

#### EXTERNAL ENEMIES

- as a young shepherd, the lambs of his father's flock were more-than-once attacked by lions and bears (note the plural! 1 Sam 17:34-37; "if he [*the bear*] arose against me, I caught him by his beard and struck him and killed him."). But he was crystal clear: "*The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine!*"
- as a young warrior, he faced Goliath and the hosts of the Philistine armies.
- as Israel's king, he faced the surrounding nations which sought to exterminate Israel from the map (note: the hatred we see today in the Middle East has deep roots in centuries of violence)

#### INTERNAL ENEMIES

- as a musician in Saul's court, he faced the volcanic outburst of the King's mental illnesses
- as a fugitive he fled day after day, year after year, evading Saul's efforts to kill him for almost a dozen years
- people in the nation of Israel set themselves against David
- his own family members became his enemies

#### IMBEDDED ENEMY

- David knew that his own heart--his sin, his pride, his misuse of privileges--could be his enemy. One night he found himself on his rooftop rather than in battle, watching his own pornographic website of a gorgeous woman (the wife of one of his warriors) bathing. Within a few short minutes and with quick, foolish decisions, David fed his sinful heart and crippled his life from those moments forward.

Writing this prayer, what did David keenly KNOW? He knew what you and I know. Without a habit of coming to the Lord, pouring out his heart, and asking for the Lord's hand in dealing (in his

timetable) with external enemies, internal enemies, and even the enemy which can be your heart – we are vulnerable. Echoing still in my head are John Walvoord’s words in a DTS seminary chapel: “Young men, Satan hates you; he will destroy you if he can.”

<sup>25:2</sup> O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.  
<sup>3</sup> Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;

### **Habit #2**

#### **Honestly seeking God’s forgiveness**

<sup>6</sup> Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.  
<sup>7</sup> Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;  
according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!  
<sup>11</sup> For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

Do you ask your Lord to forgive your sin? Recently, I was reminded by a dear friend that this may be noticeably absent from our own worship together. Confessing our sin. Conversing with Him about what needs to be identified and cleaned up. Roger Barrier<sup>viii</sup> remembers that

*When I left for college, my mother – who had always done my laundry – made a canvas duffel bag for me. “Put your dirty clothes in this every night,” she said. “At the end of the week, wash them at the laundromat.”*

*Several days later, I took my dirty clothes to the laundromat. To save time, I threw the duffel bag in the washer, put in some laundry, inserted the proper change, and turned on the machine. Moments later, a loud **thump, thump, thump, thump** echoed through the establishment. A pretty coed approached me with a grin. “I watched you load your washer. I think our clothes would get cleaner if you took them out of the bag.”*

*One day (Roger continues), when my relationship with God was hurting, I remembered my laundry episode. I realized the way I confessed sins – “Dear God, please forgive me for all the sins I’ve committed today”—was about as effective as my first attempt at washing clothes. Each sin needs individual attention.*

This is why David, after his specific sin with Bathsheba, with Uriah her husband and before Nathan the prophet, would write (Psalm 32, p. 462)

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.  
Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity;  
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,”  
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

**The friendship of God is fully enjoyed by the one  
who gives himself – in every way – to the Lord**

**trusting in trouble – honest with sin**

### **Habit #3**

#### **Eagerly learning God's ways**

<sup>4</sup> Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths.

<sup>5</sup> Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.

<sup>8</sup> Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

<sup>9</sup> He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

<sup>10</sup> All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,  
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

<sup>12</sup> Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will He instruct in the way that he should choose.

<sup>13</sup> His soul shall abide in well-being, and his offspring shall inherit the land.

<sup>14</sup> The **friendship of the LORD** (i.e., council/counsel) is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

Did you notice the requests of those verses? “Make me to know...teach me...lead me in.” David’s intentional pursuit. Lord, I need to know, I want to know your ways, your paths, your truth! It’s...”the man who fears the Lord (vs.12) who will be *instructed in the way that he should choose.*”

Yes...I’m coming after you this morning! We’re talking about habits which usher us into the friendship of God. Is there an eagerness in my life, in your life, to KNOW God’s ways? Please notice who gets this graduate-level instruction – vs. 9: *He leads the humble in what is right; He teaches the humble* (עֲנִיָּים vb. “bowed down, afflicted,” even “poor, weak, meek” cf. Ps.10:17, 22:27,34:3, 37:11, 69:33) *his way.*

*God created the world out of nothing. As long as we are nothing,  
He can make something out of us. (Martin Luther)*

*Humility must always be doing its work like a bee making  
its honey in the hive: without humility all will be lost.  
(Teresa of Avila)*

*The more humble a man is in himself, the more obedient toward God, the wiser he will be in all things, and the more shall  
his soul be at peace. (Thomas A Kempis)*

*Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil’s reach as humility.  
(Jonathan Edwards)<sup>x</sup>*

These are remarkable verses, pregnant with promise. Derek Kidner insightfully comments on vs. 14: “Friendship” is the Hebrew word *sôd* (סֹד = both a circle of familiar friends, and the secret counsel which they share; thus *intimacy with*; cf. BDB 691C, Amos 3:7, Prov.11:13, 20:19, 25:9), meaning both “council” and “counsel – both the circle of one’s close associates and the matters that are discussed with them.”

What a song for David to sing to us! Anyone can be on the “inside;” anyone can fully enjoy the

intimate friendship of God if/when that person decides to give yourself to habits which draw you close to the Lord:

- the **habit** of trusting Him with troublesome enemies,
- the **habit** of honestly confessing one's sin and receiving God's cleansing forgiveness,
- the **habit** of eagerly, humbly learning God's ways and ushered into his counsel.

#### **Habit #4**

##### **Persistently *focusing* on God himself**

<sup>15</sup> My eyes **are ever toward the LORD**, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

<sup>20</sup> Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for **I take refuge in you**.

<sup>21</sup> May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for **I wait for you**.

#### **CAN I LIVE THIS?**

This morning, if I'm you, I'm asking this: *"Hey Pastor David. You've been talking about **habits**. If this Psalm is actually illustrating the habits which result in God's presence, in real friendship with God...what do I do with what you've just laid out here?"*

Listen to best-selling author James Clear, *Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results*

Your life today is essentially the sum of your **habits**.

How in shape or out of shape you are? A result of your habits.

How happy or unhappy you are? A result of your habits.

How successful or unsuccessful you are? A result of your habits.

What you repeatedly do (i.e. what you spend time thinking about and doing each day) ultimately forms **the person you are**, the things you believe, and the personality that you portray.<sup>x</sup>

James Clear's story is intriguing. After 2 years of recovery from a HS baseball accident that literally smashed in his face and ended, it seemed, his athletic career...well, he writes this:<sup>xi</sup>

I began college at Denison University after two years of my injury. There first time in my life, I discovered the power of small habits. In Denison, I decided to make a schedule and get my life in order. My classmates stayed up late nights and played video games while I made a habit of good sleep. I went to bed early every night. My peers put their things in a mess while I kept my stuff in order. I kept my place neat and clean. I started lifting weights multiple times per week. I focused on improving my study and getting A's in my First year. These all were little things and my small efforts in return improved my confidence. It gave me the feeling that I had control over my life.

**A habit is a routine or behavior that is implemented regularly.** I was collecting many small habits every semester. I had developed my sleep habits, eating habits and strength training habits. I was not aware that all of these little things would go to pay me off. At the end of the sophomore season, I was the captain of my team and was selected for the all-conference team. Six years after my serious incident, I was selected as a top male athlete at Denison University, and I was rewarded the university's highest academic honor, president's medal. My name was also written in school record books, in eight different categories.

He adds...

We put all our focus and efforts on one huge moment of change. We totally ignore our small daily habits of improvement. How many of us daily improve our life by one percent?

Let me explain you this concept mathematically. If you start improving your life by one percent every day for one year, you will be thirty-seven times better at the end, but if you get worse in your life every day for one year, you will come down to zero. Habits are like compound interest of personal-improvement.

Quite honestly, King David had it down long before James Clear. And, it all really depends on what kind of person you want to be. Here's Psalm 25's promise:

**The friendship of God is fully enjoyed by the one  
who gives himself – with small, powerful habits,  
in every way – to the Lord**

*trusting God when facing enemies, trouble  
honestly seeking forgiveness and cleansing  
eagerly, humbly learning God's ways  
persistently focusing on Him*

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*BEAUTIFUL HYMN OF WORSHIP – expressing the principle*

*ABIDE WITH ME*

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see—  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour;  
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?  
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;  
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;  
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalm 1-72*, p.115: "The Hebrew alphabet, with an occasional irregularity, supplies the framework of the Psalm, in which the pressure of **enemies**, the need of **guidance** and the burden of **guilt** take turns being the dominant concern. The tone is subdued, and the singer's **trust** is sown in patient waiting rather than the outburst of joy which sometimes marks the climax of such a Psalm. Right outside the alphabetic scheme, the final verse claims for Israel what David has petitioned for himself, so making of a personal plea a hymn for the whole congregation."

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<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.thefastlaneforum.com/community/threads/the-power-of-dedication.70156/>

<sup>iii</sup> J.J. Stewart Perowne *The Book of Psalms*, pp.257-258, on Psalm 25. "The Psalm hardly admits of formal division. It is a prayer for instruction and forgiveness. The recurrence of certain expressions, such as "**waiting**" (vs. 2,3,5,20,21) and "**afflicted**" (vs. 9, 16,18,); the prayer for "**instruction**" (vs.4,5,8,9, 12,14), together with earnest entreaty for "**forgiveness**" (vs.7,11,18) gives a peculiar character to the Psalm. Its prevailing thought is that God is the teacher of the afflicted, and the guide of the erring: and this is constantly repeated in the way of statement or prayer."

<sup>iv</sup> SOUL: JEWISH CONCEPT <https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/soul-jewish-concept>

Unlike the Egyptian and Akkadian terms that have been translated as "soul" (e.g., ba, ka, khu, shimtu, shedu, ishtarū ), the most important Hebrew words for this concept (nefesh, neshamah or nishmah, and ruah ) do not primarily refer to appearance, destiny, power, or supernatural influences, but to respiration—the inner, animating element of life. While the Hebrew Bible distinguishes between spirit and flesh, it does not accept the type of dualism of body and soul characteristic of Greek thought. Hebrew terms for the soul usually refer to an activity or characteristic of the body or to an entire living being. To "afflict the soul" means to practice physical self-denial (Lv. 16:29ff.).

Hebrew nefesh, usually translated as "soul," refers to the breath, as does the term neshamah (or nishmah ), which became the most common word for the soul in postbiblical Hebrew. The verbs formed from the roots of these words (nafash and nasham ) mean "to breathe." The two words are found together in Genesis 2:7, which narrates how the first human (adam ) received the breath of life (nishmat hayyim ) from God and became a living soul (nefesh hayyah ). Another meaning of nefesh is "life," particularly animal life. Here the soul is a kind of material principle of vitality, which is separable from the inert substance (basar ) of the body. Neshamah, on the other hand, sometimes refers particularly to conscious life or intelligence. Nefesh also may refer to mental states, in particular to strong emotions or physical cravings. At times nefesh refers to human capabilities, such as the capacity for eloquent speech.

The word ruah, which is often rendered as "spirit," refers to powers or actions outside the body and often has the meaning of "wind." Ruah is the mysterious vitality in the material body, which is considered a divine gift. Ruah sometimes denotes forces external to the body that operate in or through the body or the mental faculties. These forces are states of exaltation and depression beyond normal experience that come and go "like the wind." (The clearest example of the various meanings of ruah in a single passage is Ezekiel 37:1–14, the vision of the valley of dry bones.)

According to the Hebrew Bible, a dead human being remains in possession of the soul upon entering She 'ol, a shadowy place sometimes synonymous with the grave, where the vitality and energy associated with worldly life are drastically decreased. Since both the body and the soul enter She 'ol, the later doctrine of the resurrection (as expressed in Isaiah 24–27 and Daniel 12) indicates a reentry into life in both aspects. The first definite appearance in Jewish thought of a doctrine of personal survival of death in a general resurrection of the dead comes in the literature associated with the Hasmonean Revolt (166–164 bce), from which time it increases in importance to become a central dogma, later a part of the basic doctrine of Christianity.

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/nephesh.html>

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. Psalm 86:4, 143:8

<sup>vii</sup> **ENEMIES, GUIDANCE, GUILT, TRUST**--D. Kidner on Psalm 25, *Psalm 1-72*.

<sup>viii</sup> Roger Barrier, *Listening to the Voice of God* (Bethany, 1998), in Larson, TenElshof, Gen.ed.s., *1001 Illustrations that Connect*.

<sup>ix</sup> Quotes from Andrew Murray, *Humility: The Journey Toward Holiness* (Bethany House, 2001)

<sup>x</sup> <https://jamesclear.com/three-steps-habit-change>

<sup>xi</sup> Summary of *Atomic Habits* By James Clear: [An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones](#) . Kindle Edition.